

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-15 ISO-00 EB-07 SP-02 L-03 INR-07 PM-04

OES-06 IO-13 /068 W

----- 077990

R 092232Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0016

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STADIS////////////////////////////////

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PORG, PAHO, EAGR, PN

SUBJECT: REGIONAL VESICULAR DISEASE LABORATORY

REF: A. PANAMA 3614, B. PANAMA 5547

1. REPRESENTATIVES OF PANCANAL, USDA AND EMBASSY MET ON NOVEMBER 30 TO DISCUSS THE STATUS OF THE GOP-PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION (PAHO) REQUEST TO ESTABLISH A REGIONAL VESICULAR DISEASE LABORATORY (VDL) IN THE CANAL ZONE. AT THE BEGINNING OF THE MEETING, PANCANAL REPS PROVIDED COPY OF SECRETARY OF THE ARMY HOFFMAN'S REPLY TO FORMER AGRICULTURE SECRETARY BUTZ' LETTER SUPPORTING THE PROJECT. REPLY RESTATES THE JURISDICTIONAL AND TECHNICAL RESERVATIONS PREVIOUSLY EXPRESSED BY PAN CANAL (REF A). EMBASSY OFFICERS COMMENTED THAT THE LETTER APPEARED TO BE RATHER DATED SINCE, AS THE RESULT OF A SERIES OF MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE DEPARTMENTS OF THE ARMY, STATE AND AGRICULTURE, (A) PAHO HAS NOW PRESENTED A DIRECT REQUEST TO THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGIONAL VDL IN THE CANAL ZONE, THUS ELIMINATING THE INTERMEDIARY ROLE OF THE GOP, AND (B) USDA HAS INFORMALLY INDICATED THAT IT WOULD BE WILLING TO LEASE THE LABORATORY FROM PAN CANAL AND SUB-LEASE IT TO PAHO, AN ARRANGEMENT THAT WOULD PERMIT IT TO EXERCISE TECHNICAL OVERSIGHT FOR THE VDL OPERATION. PANCANAL ALSO REPORTED THAT A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ARMY'S ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES UNIT HAD RECENTLY CONDUCTED A SURVEY

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RONMENTAL STUDIES UNIT HAD RECENTLY CONDUCTED A SURVEY

OF THE MARU FACILITY (BUILDING 254) AND HAD DISCOVERED SERIOUS DEFICIENCIES IN THE PHYSICAL SECURITY OF THE STRUCTURE. A FORMAL REPORT OF THE SURVEY RESULTS SHOULD BE AVAILABLE SOON AND A FOLLOW-UP REPORT SPECIFYING THE MODIFICATIONS TO THE STRUCTURE NECESSARY TO PROVIDE SAFEGUARDS FOR OPERATIONS WITH VESICULAR DISEASE SPECIMENS WILL ALSO BE PREPARED. REPRESENTATIVES AT THE MEETING AGREED THAT WITH THE FORMAL PAHO REQUEST THE DECISION ON VDL IS NOW WASHINGTON-BASED, THAT OUR ROLE IN PANAMA IS STRICTLY SUPPORTIVE AND FACTFINDING AND THAT THE NEXT STEP BY US IN PANAMA WOULD BE TO SCHEDULE THE MEETING BETWEEN THE USDA AND PANCANAL WOULD BE TO SCHEDULE THE MEETING BETWEEN THE USDA AND PANCANAL REPRESENTATIVES AS SUGGESTED IN SECRETARY HOFFMAN'S LETTER.

2. COMMENT: IN VIEW OF THE DISCOVERY OF SIGNIFICANT PHYSICAL DEFICIENCIES IN BUILDING 254 AND PANCANAL'S CONTINUED RELUCTANCE TO LOCATE THE VDL IN A CONGESTED AREA, WE WOULD RECOMMEND THAT SOME THOUGHT BE GIVEN TO: (1) AN ALTERNATIVE LOCATION IN THE CANAL ZONE, AND (2) THE MEANS OF FUNDING EITHER THE CONVERSION OF AN EXISTING STRUCTURE INTO A TYPE 3 LABORATORY, OR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW FACILITY. THE PREPARATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT EVALUATION FOR SUCH A FACILITY WOULD PROVIDE A BASIS FOR DETERMINING ADDITIONAL FUNDING NEEDED FOR THE PROJECT. MEANWHILE, BOTH THE TENOR OF SECRETARY HOFFMAN'S LETTER AND COMMENTS OF PANCANAL OFFICIALS DURING THIS MEETING REINFORCE OUR IMPRESSION THAT ANY SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS ON THIS PROJECT WILL DEPEND ON INITIATIVES AND DECISIONS TAKEN IN WASHINGTON.

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** Z  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** MEDICAL FACILITIES, ANIMAL DISEASES, ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICES, LABORATORIES  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 09 DEC 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** blochd0  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1976PANAMA08349  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** N/A  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** D760456-0909  
**From:** PANAMA  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Image Path:**  
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**Legacy Key:** link1976/newtext/t19761258/aaaabxyx.tel  
**Line Count:** 93  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION ARA  
**Original Classification:** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** STADIS  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 2  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** STADIS  
**Reference:** 76 PANAMA 3614, 76 PANAMA 5547  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** blochd0  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 26 JUL 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <26 JUL 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <29 OCT 2004 by blochd0>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** REGIONAL VESICULAR DISEASE LABORATORY  
**TAGS:** PORG, EAGR, PN, PQ, PAHO  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006